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THEORIES OF PROGRESS

The review which Professor Carver gave my *Social Basis of Religion*¹ was a model of sympathy and courtesy, and I would be the last person to find fault with it. There is, however, a fundamental difference between his views and mine that we shall all gain having clearly defined. My view is an economic interpretation of progress, while Professor Carver's is a biologic interpretation. That he is an economist may obscure this, but the reader should notice that he quotes Spencer, not Mill, when he states ultimate principles. Our difference may be put in another way by saying that he is interested in Race Progress, while I am interested in Social Adjustment. I presume he will say that the two cannot be separated, that the one involves the other. This connection, I admit, in so far as it concerns ultimate adjustment to a distant Utopia, but not as regards that actual adjustment open to any race under given conditions. Americans can become adjusted to present America without race progress. Such an adjustment is wholly economic, and does not demand elimination or race evolution. I have not said that at the beginning of the historical epoch man was vastly inferior physically, socially and morally to what he had been in some previous epoch, but that during the historical epoch he has become socially and morally inferior to what he was when this epoch began. The fall, as I see it, was first economic, then social, moral and religious, in turn. It has thus involved every phase of social life, but without serious physical effects.

The conventional theory may picture the prehistoric state of man as confined to a single epoch, with which a later degenerate condition revealed by history is contrasted. This is not my view. I have conceived even this prehistoric condition as one involving a long evolution. There was no moment when primitive man was in an economic "Garden of Eden," but every element of this picture at some time had its influence on the evolution of man. Animals, fruits, grains, metals, and favorable products and conditions, each in turn, acted on man and helped in his elevation. They came in a series that gave the net result of a "Garden of Eden" without its actuality. It is the form of the picture, not its content, that is wrong. There is no need of discarding it if we think of it in terms not of creation, but of evolution. Historically

¹ See American Economic Review, Dec., 1911, p. 790.

viewed, the "Garden of Eden" is a myth, but genetically it was a reality.

It indicates a lack of historical perspective to apply modern theories of overpopulation and diminishing returns to this prehistoric society. Overpopulation depends not merely on a physical capacity to increase population, but on a social willingness to preserve it. Before life was deemed sacred, there could be no overpopulation. Children were exposed when they became disadvantageous. Primitive morality would not have striven to protect life if primitive societies had felt the pressure of overpopulation. It is only after the religious advance of the historic epoch that life was overconserved and the evils of numbers arose.

Primitive races alternated between periods of deficit and plenty. They not only had good seasons, but good years and even good epochs. Then would come famine, war or disease sweeping off multitudes and creating actual underpopulation. The picture that poets, prophets and social tradition give were founded on facts. The "pastures green" and the "lands flowing with milk and honey" were more than dreams. They seem absurd only to those who can picture nothing by nineteenth century misery.

Real differences in doctrine and thought lie deeper and do not depend on the truthfulness or accuracy of these pictures. During the long prehistoric epoch did the race rise through the helps or the hindrances of its environment? Did man advance during the periods of plenty, or when hardship pressed heavily on him? The one view involves an economic interpretation of progress; the other, a biologic. The latter holds that progress comes through elimination. Disease, war, famine, hardship and misfortune are its main agents. When they cease, or when human sympathy prevents elimination, the forces making for degeneration are supposed to be operative. Even if this is the way in which physical degeneration happens, it does not follow that social degeneration is thus caused. The latter, as is well known, starts in periods of prosperity and is checked, not promoted, by economic failure or hardship. This type of degeneration must be analyzed and accounted for before we can determine the part elimination should play. Let me, therefore, picture the situation in which it arises and the evils that flow from it.

Let us suppose that the introduction of economic improvements

enables the yearly income of each family to be raised from \$500 to \$600. One of two results can follow. Each man can work less than before and maintain the old standard, or he can put out the same energy as before and have a higher standard. If he puts out less energy, there will be a slump in his social standards; if he puts out the same or more energy, a rise in these standards will follow. The adjustment taking place in either case springs from a social and not from a biological change. If the social standard is raised to meet the new economic situation, new acquired characters must be formed; if the social standard is lowered, some of the old acquired characters are lost. Every improving economic situation brings this choice. Some men take one and sink, while others take the other and rise. Social degeneration is thus a constant menace in an advancing society. Either new characters and higher standards must be acquired, or degeneration sets in reducing the vitality of the group.

The problem then is: Can this new situation be met by the acquisition of new social characters or must a biologic evolution be put in operation? The answer again raises the issue between the economic and the biologic interpretations of progress. The premises of the biologic progress need not be restated. The elements of the economic interpretation, however, demand elucidation. The series of steps from economic improvement to social adjustment are: more industrial activity, a higher standard of life, more will power, greater moral vigor and increased religious enthusiasm. This series divided itself into two parts: the strictly economic changes with which each epoch of progress starts, and the thought changes that grow out of them. Thought changes differ from the economic in that they are psychic and not material; but they are similar in that being acquired they do not demand biologic improvement. The whole series from social degeneration to social adjustment may be completed without any alteration in innate characters. For each stage of economic improvement there is a group of acquired characters that must be imposed to secure social adjustment. Social evolution must follow economic improvement, or social degeneration sets in. It is this fact that brings social morality and social religion in harmony with economics, making material and religious progress a part of one scheme.

One of the anomalies of the biologic theory of progress is that at one point its advocates set aside biologic knowledge, and put in its place an antiquated social theory. I refer to the Malthusian theory of population. I presume that a hundred years ago the data of Malthus might have been called historical, but this kind of history has long since passed away. The old notion of man assumed that sexual instinct was so strong that social institutions could not keep it from injuring the race. Malthus had no inkling of purely economic checks to population. The industrial advance of the last century has shown what these checks are and how they work. The rise in the standard of life has set limits to the increase of population in all classes affected by it. An even greater force is the economic independence of woman due to her admission into industry. So strong are these purely economic forces that the cry of race suicide has displaced the old fear of overpopulation.

The case, however, does not rest here; biology has come to the aid of economics by showing how defective the old notions of sex were. It is true that men have strong sexual instincts, but in normal woman they are weak. The fact is that man loves the woman and the woman loves the child. Evolution has given man strong sexual, but weak parental instincts, while the reverse is true of woman. The male all through the biologic evolution of life has been eager to beget offspring, but has cared little for them when they appear. The female has had little motive to beget offspring, but has a powerful impulse to preserve them. These qualities would not create overpopulation unless supplemented by qualities acquired since social institutions remolded the ideas and relations of men and women. Women have been subjected to men; men, on the other hand, have been forced by social pressure to care for their children. In overpopulation, we thus find four elements. Man's passion and woman's love of children are natural. Woman's subjugation and man's support of his offspring are acquired. Social adjustment would do away with the subjugation of women; it would also do away with unsocial man who will not support his children. The desire of man for sexual indulgence can be checked by making him care for wife and child. Mothers will cease to have large families when their freedom is assured. Social causes are sufficient to bring both of these changes, and with them the bugbear of overpopulation loses its terrors.

I recently asked a prominent social worker whether biologic or economic arguments were the more effective in checking the degeneration. His reply was that physical degeneration and its consequences would arouse a reaction in public opinion that economic arguments could not effect. Striking pictures of decadent classes can be visualized, and through them the emotions are so aroused as to prevent their perpetuation. The weakness of this argument is the same as that of philanthropy. Sympathy is on the side of the weak, and when their suffering is vividly portrayed relief is usually forthcoming. It, however, acts intermittently and not enough relief is given to rehabilitate the sufferer. Half support is socially worse than no support, and yet this half support is all that philanthropy is able to evoke. And so it will be with the horrid pictures that biologic reformers seek to employ. No doubt some forms of elimination can be set in operation in this way. But they will only be against the horrors of picturesque degeneration, and not against its underlying causes. So long as the economic mill grinds a new grist of degenerates in each generation, the elimination of a few Juke families will be of no avail.

The economic basis for the elimination of dependency does not rest on present physical horrors nor on the prophecy of worldwide disaster at distant dates. The line between those to be perpetuated and those to be cut off is the line of self-support. The criminal, the vicious, and the pauper cost the public each year more than their full support would cost. It seems like a prodigious undertaking to withdraw this class permanently from society, but the burdens they create would thus be reduced and the stimulus of progress would be instantly felt. It is only the economic argument against exploitation, woman's degradation and the half support of defectives that is effective; and reformers must resort to it for all deep-seated reforms. Biology may startle, and philanthropy may occasionally bring us to tears, but they have no cure for the underlying evils blocking human progress.

The viewpoint of the preceding discussion is that of social adjustment and not of race progress. I have tried to show that through changes in acquired characters, social adjustment can be secured and degeneration removed. If, however, the doctrines enunciated are correct, the way to race progress is also open.

The biologic view emphasizes elimination, but it does not bring out what are the positive qualities that are to be developed or how they are to be impressed. There is a vague belief that if the weak are removed a stronger man will come, but there is an ominous silence as to where we are to look for him or how to know him when he arrives. The economist, however, does not have to predict or to guess; for the new man and the new woman are already on hand in large numbers. On the negative side, also, the sort of elimination that economic forces bring into operation is plain. The elimination is against sexual appetite in man, and fear in woman. It favors social and aggressive qualities. Man is becoming social; woman is becoming aggressive. In primitive societies the sexual man dominated, forcing women into subjection. This continued as long as military societies shaped social evolution. Woman's industrial freedom breaks these bonds and enables the more aggressive to survive. The check thus put on man's passion drives the unsocial man to seek intercourse outside the family. The over-sexed thus buy their indulgence and avoid the high costs of supporting wife and children. The evolution of men while not complete is apparent, as are also the aggressive tendencies of the modern woman freed by industry from her long-standing subjugation. All this is readily seen and often commented on. The trouble is that men do not like it, and oppose it as much as they can. They are not willing to regard as evolution the economic changes that alter their social qualities, but denounce them in season and out. But whether they like it or not, they are in the grip of inexorable law that will socialize them in spite of themselves. We need less sex and more will power. Both changes are under way, and from them the radical uplift will come, opening up new vistas of progress.

The biologic type of religion is, as Professor Carver affirms, a "red-hot" religion. To my mind this is the reason why it has fallen into disrepute. The religion of the sword and the religion of peace have only a name in common. The one initiates struggle and brute contests which separate brother, friend and nation; the other unites them into an harmonious whole. All the feelings and sympathies the one arouses are suppressed by the other. The religion of the Thirty Years War was truly a "red-hot" religion, but thirty years of it was as much as Europe could stand. We

should tire of brutal elimination even more quickly if it were tried. There is a great difference between the socially adapted and the socially suppressed, between the unfit and the exploited, between preventing retardation and creating race progress. We know how to aid social adjustment and how to conserve human life. For them we are responsible, and in their favor religion and morality should be aroused. We do not yet know how to secure race progress; we should therefore object to crude experiments until further biologic knowledge opens up sane methods of securing it. When we line up to what we know, we can begin to reach out to the unknown.

Speaking of the failure of Christianity to check degeneration, Professor Carver says "the larger and more influential the sect, the less successfully has it met it." He might also have said the greater and more influential the civilization, the more apparent has its failure been. These being the facts, what is the church to do? Shall it try to improve civilization so that it can meet the test of prosperity, or shall it extend Christianity so that it shall become a universal religion? We know how to extend Christianity. We can, if we will, make China a Christian nation. Every needed element is well in hand; we require only time, money and energy to bring about the desired change. Much of the difficulty of conserving civilization is due to the limited area in which it is supreme. A world civilization would be much more secure and the ways to supplement its weakness would be much more apparent.

There is, however, more than this back of my position. To increase knowledge is within the power of only a few rare men. In the spread of knowledge every man can take part. Not to use the missionary spirit, now active, would be a misfortune. To turn ordinary men from solved problems to biologic enigmas would be a crime. There never was a time when to do something useful was as easy as at present; nor was there ever a time when to be truly original was as difficult. All the easy roads to immortality have been trodden. Homer's *Iliads*, Plato's *Republics*, Shakespeare's dramas and Kant's *Critiques* can no longer be picked up by the wayside. We need "Immortals" badly enough, but to get them is increasingly difficult. Shall we teach clergymen to "hitch their wagons to a star," or to follow well-paved roads to social usefulness?

To this there is but one answer. We economists err as often in answering it for our own students as when we offer religious advice. All our students can be taught to help their neighbors improve their lives. Few of them can face with success unsolved problems. When a returning student says to me, "I am tired of doing other people; tell me how I can help them," it is easy to point out satisfying ways of doing this. But when a budding economist says, "I am tired of the old theory of value; tell me how to make a new one," the only reply I can make is that I have tried all my life to do this and have failed. Feeling this in my own field, I do not hesitate to offer like advice to Christians. The missionary harvest is ready for all earnest workers. That we cannot solve the problems the next century has to face is no reason for not doing a present duty. In the meantime, some "Immortal" may open up avenues of further progress by removing obstacles that no civilization has been able to overcome. This, however, is his duty not ours.

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